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Madison Weekly: A look at what is happening at the State Capitol

Advertisement

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WHAT HAPPENED

No action on Ethics, Elections boards

A bill to combine the state Ethics and Elections boards into a new stronger agency with greater enforcement power recently stalled in the state Assembly, but some supporters are not giving up hope. The Bill, Senate Bill 1, authored by state Sen. Mike Ellis, R-Neenah, failed to get a vote in the Assembly. State Rep. Terri McCormick, R-Greenville, on Friday sent a letter to Gov. Jim Doyle requesting he call a special session for legislative action on the bill. "It is no secret that the public's trust in government is near an all-time low, and for good reason," McCormick wrote. "We owe it to our constituents to vote on this one small step toward changing the status quo in Madison and holding politicians accountable for their conduct."

As of Friday, a special session seemed unlikely. Doyle spokesman Dan Leistikow said Republican leadership held up the bill and had no intention of passing it. "It's clear that the only thing that will make the Legislature pass the bill is when we have a new legislature," Leistikow said.

Motorcycle bill

A bill a state lawmaker says would improve highway safety awaits Doyle's signature. According to State Rep. Don Pridemore, R-Hartford, the Roadway Users Responsibility Act will improve highway safety and enhance driver-education classes. According to a Pridemore press release, the bill requires driver's-education classes to include "share the road" curriculum. It also would eliminate the requirement for instructional permits for people who successfully complete a more comprehensive basic rider safety course. It also would allow motorcycles to proceed through a red light after waiting at least 45 seconds if the light fails to detect the motorcycle.

Senate dumps tax amendment

The state Senate voted down two versions of a proposed constitutional amendment to limit government spending Thursday night and did not consider a third version passed by the Assembly last week.

The Taxpayer Protection Act had gone through several versions before coming down to the wire this week, which marked the end of the regular legislative session.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"SJR 5 will allow the citizens of Wisconsin to decide how they want to sentence horrific and vicious murderers in their neighborhoods. In fact, these are the same citizens that we place our trust in to act on our behalf as a jury in our judicial system." — State Sen. Alan Lasee, R-Rockland, in a statement Friday after the state Assembly passed a resolution allowing a nonbinding advisory referendum on the death penalty in November.

"This is an idea whose time has come and gone," said Senate Minority Leader Judy Robson, D-Beloit.

Another Assembly bill that passed last week but was not considered by the Senate this week was the anti-price gouging legislation.

The Senate version, Senate Bill 358, covers goods and services but would go into effect only during governor-declared states of emergency. That measure passed the Senate on Wednesday and was approved by the Assembly on Thursday.

The Assembly version would have dealt mainly with gas prices and would have prohibited companies from excessively increasing gas prices within a three-week period.

National honor

Wisconsin's Green Tier program advanced Thursday as one of 18 finalists for a national award given by Harvard University for government innovations.

The program is administered by the state Department of Natural Resources and was formed to encourage environmentally responsible companies to go beyond meeting minimum regulations for pollution control.

The program is eligible to win one of seven \$100,000 grants to be issued by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"This recognition from the Harvard Ash Institute increases the opportunity for the Green Tier program to serve as a model which can be implemented across the country," said Rep. Phil Montgomery, R-Ashwaubenon, who co-authored a bill that helped establish the Green Tier program.

Energy assistance

Wisconsin residents who meet income restrictions have time to apply for heating assistance. According to the state Department of Administration, qualified households will receive a \$200-\$300 payment to help with their utility bills. The application deadline is May 15.

"Energy assistance is available for households up to 175 percent of the federal poverty level, which is just under \$34,000 for a family of four," said Kimberly Walker, administrator of the Division of Energy. "We are encouraging anyone who thinks they may qualify for assistance to apply before the May 15th deadline."

To apply, call (800) 522-3014 or visit energyhelp.wi.gov.